ALBERTA PRECONDITIONED

ALBERTA CERTIFIED PRECONDITIONED FEEDER PROGRAM

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I. SUMMARY

Like most of the cattle business, the Alberta Certified Preconditioned Feeder Program faced uncertain prospects in 1985. The drought initially caused many producers to consider preconditioning to extend their pastures and increase calf returns, but the fall rains brought on pasture growth and delayed harvest. As a result, many cow-calf producers didn't follow through with their plans to precondition. In total 17,247 head of calves were ear-tagged and certified as preconditioned in 1985.

Prices paid for preconditioned calves varied with the time of year and location. Feeder calf prices dropped in November with the onset of cold weather and the occurrence of respiratory disease problems in Alberta feedlots. Preconditioned calf sales began as the weather stabilized and buyer demand increased. As a result prices at these sales were substantially higher, particularly in areas where farmer-feeders, with tough grain, were buying calves. These buyers certainly appeared to push the price up on heavier calves in the central Alberta sales. Ontario buyers were represented at all the major sales again this year. Generally they purchased the large drafts of top quality reputation calves.

The prices paid for preconditioned calves averaged $5.29/cwt more than for regular calves. This premium varied due to selling condition, length of weaning period, local demand and type of feed the calves had been fed. The highest premiums were paid for calves which were weaned more than 60 days and were started on silage rations. Preconditioned calves which were sold in small numbers at mixed sales received very small premiums, if any. Buyers seem to be reluctant to pay premiums for small numbers of preconditioned calves which then have to be mixed with regular calves to complete a load.

Information compiled from 77 herds including 6,275 calves indicates producers have benefited economically from the program. The average cost of preconditioning was $49.19 per head, including $34.84 for feed, $2.65 for vaccine and insecticide and the balance for labor and veterinary expenses. The health performance of weaned calves was good in 1985. Death loss after weaning was 0.73%, of which 0.2% was due to

bloat and 0.1% to respiratory problems. Although individual treatment rates varied, the average was 4.6%. Over all 77 herds surveyed, 20.5% of the calves received mass medication of some type, such as: sulfa in the water, injections of long acting tetracycline, or medicated feed.

Weaning weight and performance data obtained from 18 herds, including 1985 calves, shows above average weight gains. The average daily gain for steer calves was 1.95 lbs. and for heifers 1.94 lb. The average weaning period was 62 days, with a total cost of $62.38 per head or $0.52 per pound of gain. These costs included labor or yardage costs but do not include interest costs. The estimated net return was $54.23 per calf. This excellent return was the result of the high weight gains and the long weaning period.

A survey of feedlots, which purchased certified calves, revealed that preconditioning substantially reduced disease problems again this year. Only 3.8% of preconditioned calves were treated and 0.17% died, compared to 27.2% treated and 1.2% death loss for regular calves in Alberta. Combined data since 1980 indicates that preconditioning reduces treatment rates to one-half and death losses to one-third that of regular calves.

Preconditioning is most successful where the auction market operator, District Agriculturist and veterinarian work together to contact and encourage producers to participate.

II. INTRODUCTION

Preconditioning is a program designed to reduce the economic loss caused by stress and disease during the movement of calves from the cow herd to the feedlot. Calves which are weaned, vaccinated, and started on feed by the producer are better prepared to withstand this stress.

Preconditioning is not a new concept to many Alberta producers. The requirements associated with preconditioning are sound management practices which have been followed by some producers for many years.

Before 1980, sales of preconditioned calves had been tried at various locations in Alberta with little success. Cattle buyers and feeders were unwilling to pay a premium for calves that did not carry a guarantee or certificate of the procedures which had been done. The lack of a uniform program and promotion of the concept also contributed to the lack of success and acceptance by cattlemen.

The Alberta Certified Preconditioned Feeder (ACPF) Program developed from meetings held in Ponoka during the spring of 1980. Various representatives of the cattle industry and Alberta Agriculture drafted the initial guidelines for the program. A group of interested producers formed a local society and held their first sale November 8, 1980. The program has now expended to cover most of the Province.

Initially, the program had two options to accommodate the greatest number of producers. One was the preconditioned program which is largely unchanged, and the other was the preimmunization option which was similar but the calves were not weaned. The preimmunization option was discontinued in 1984.

In 1981, an Advisory Committee was established by Ministerial Order to provide guidance and authority in the operation of the program. Representation on the committee consisted of 3 cattle producers, 3 representatives of Alberta Agriculture, and one each from the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association and the Alberta Auction Market Association. In 1984 it was recommended that the committee be expanded to include a member from the Alberta Cattle Commission. Each year at the annual meeting of the Advisory Committee representatives have the opportunity to propose and discuss changes to the program. Program requirements and operating guidelines are recommended to the Minister of Agriculture by the committee.

III. ACPF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

In the ACPF Program, preconditioned calves must be:

1) **At least 4 months of age prior to being vaccinated.**

2) Owned by the operator 45 days prior to sale or shipment.

3) Castrated and dehorned at least 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.

4) Vaccinated with IBR/PI_3 and multi-clostridal (7-way) vaccine 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.

5) Treated for warble grubs at least 3 weeks prior to sale or shipment.

6) Weaned for a minimum of 30 days.

7) Tagged with a green ACPF ear tag in the right ear.

8) Accompanied by an official ACPF certificate completed and signed by both the veterinarian and the producer.

Other vaccination and management practices can be added at the discretion of the producer and recorded. Information on the feeding program and breeding background is also recorded on the preconditioning certificates.

The paid veterinary visit for ear tagging and certification was reinstated in 1984 to help increase the number of preconditioned calves offered for sale and assist the expansion of the program into new areas. Each cow-calf producer will the provided with one veterinary visit per year to a maximum of three years for certification of preconditioned calves. Private veterinarians are paid directly by Alberta Agriculture.

IV. ACPF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

The Health Management Branch, Animal Health Division of Alberta Agriculture was responsible for the administration of the program. A consultant was hired for the winter months to co-ordinate the program, to collect data on calf performance during weaning, sale data, feedlot performance and compile the annual report. Eartags and certificates were issued to practicing veterinarians through the District Agriculture offices. Private veterinarians supervised the vaccination and treatment of the calves, ensured that dehorning and castration had been completed properly, applied the green eartags and recorded the times and products used on the certificates.

After all of the requirements of the ACPF Program were met, the calf producer and veterinarian signed the document to certify that the tagged cattle were fully preconditioned. Following completion of the certificate and before the sale, one copy was sent to the Branch where it was retained on file. The original copy accompanied the calves at the time of the sale so that the information could be assembled into a catalogue and made available to the buyers.

District Agriculturists continued to support the program by providing information and assistance to producers, auction market operators and the ACPF co-ordinator. They also conducted on-farm preconditioning trials, distributed the eartags and certificates, organized information meetings and sales, prepared the sale catalogues and obtained much of the sale price data. Gary Benoit organized and coordinated national advertising of the ACPF sales. A brochure outlining the program and sale dates and location was prepared and included as an insert in the Cattlemen magazine. Posters announcing sale locations and dates were distributed locally.

V. RESULTS OF THE 1985 ACPF PROGRAM

Although the 17,247 calves certified in 1985 was similar to 1984, the distribution of calves changed in the province. The numbers of preconditioned calves increased in the northeast and southern areas and decreased in the central and Peace River areas. The decrease in the Peace River was due to some individual management changes which affected the number of preconditioned calves coming from some of the grazing reserves.

Weather conditions were a major factor in many areas. Initially, the extremely dry summer caused many people to plan to precondition their calves to extend their fall pastures. However, fall rains rejuvenated many pastures and delayed harvest into late October. As a result many producers were pressed for time in the fall and didn't carry through with their plans to precondition particularly in central Alberta. A shortage of winter feed also discouraged a number of producers from

preconditioning. The areas which showed increased numbers were those where the local auction market operator, veterinarian, or district agriculturist put considerable additional effort to contact individual producers and promote the program.

The number of calves certified and sold each year are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF ACPF CALVES CERTIFIED AND SOLD 1980 - 1985

YEAR	LOCATIONS	SALES	NUMBER OF PRODUCERS	PRECONDITIONED CALVES CERTIFIED	PRECONDITIONED CALVES SOLD[1]
1980	1	1	6	867	900
1981	4	7	92	5,317	4,014
1982	9	14	198	11,594	6,339
1983	10	11	111	8,410	4,879
1984	11	12	253	17,124	9,150
1985	18	19	230	17,247	9,467

[1] Sold through monitored auction markets in Alberta.

The distribution of preconditioned calves in 1985 is presented by area in Table 2.

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF PRECONDITIONED CALVES IN ALBERTA 1985

REGION	NUMBER OF PRODUCERS 1985	CALVES CERTIFIED PRECONDITIONED 1985
1. Lethbridge	31	3,008
2. Calgary	21	2,306
3. Red Deer	49	4,194
4. Vermilion	46	2,659
5. Barrhead	58	3,734
6. Grande Prairie	25	1,346
TOTAL	230	17,247

For 1986, we plan to have a promotional brochure available to the auction markets, veterinarians and District Agriculturists which will help them explain and promote the program. The brochure should be available in

August. It will outline the contact people, the steps required to precondition calves, the expenses involved and the details of the paid veterinary visit.

The number of preconditioned calves sold at major sales in Alberta is listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3

NUMBER SOLD AT THE CERTIFIED PRECONDITIONED CALF SALES IN 1985

LOCATION	DATE	NUMBER OF CALVES
Grande Prairie	November 29	622
Clyde	December 2	807
Fort MacLeod - ACPF Calves	December 5	663
- Prime Feeders	December 6	1978
Edmonton	December 6	622
Ponoka	December 7	1,638
Red Deer	December 9	1,137
Other Sales[1]	Approximate	2,000
TOTAL		9,467

[1] Other Sales: Olds, Innisfail, Rimbey, Rocky Mountain House, Stettler, High River, Lacombe, Cereal, Bonnyville, Drayton Valley, Killam and Lethbridge.

The sales at Ponoka, Red Deer and Fort MacLeod increased significantly in 1985. The Fort MacLeod Auction Market held two sales, one mixed sale with Alberta Certified Preconditioned Calves, regular calves and some non-certified calves on December 5. This was followed by a special sale for the Prime Feeder Preconditioned calves the next day. Generally the numbers sold were increased in the central and southern areas of Alberta. There was an increase in the number of small sales this year. With good promotion these sales could grow into a significant market.

As the number of sales increase, scheduling becomes a concern. Due to the number of sales that conflict in each region, the scheduling of preconditioned sales is left to each auction market.

ACPF Sales Results

A summary of the average prices and premiums paid at the seven major preconditioned calf sales is presented in Table 4. There were a total of 7,467 head of certified preconditioned calves at these sales, approximately 80% of the ACPF calves sold by auction in 1985. The average prices were obtained from the Canfax Program or similar computer program operated at these markets. If the auction market did not have a Canfax terminal, the data was tabulated using a computer program obtained from Canfax. The price premiums were determined by comparing the average prices for preconditioned calves in the various weight ranges to the prices paid for regular calves in the same weight ranges at the sale before and the next sale after the preconditioned sale.

At the Clyde sale, the premium is somewhat distorted since this was a mixed sale with approximately 50% of the calves preconditioned and the balance were regular calves. Thus, a premium of $2.12 shown for the sale would actually be closer to a premium of $4.24 for the 50% of the calves that were preconditioned.

The number of calves at the sale is an important factor in determining the price and the premiums paid. The four largest sales received the highest prices and premiums. The highest premiums were paid at Fort MacLeod for Prime Preconditioned calves. However, the Prime Preconditioned program also required a minimum weaning period of 60 days. ITEME and BVD vaccines, selenium injections and Ivermectin was also included in their program and all calves were on silage rations. These were also reputation cattle.

The lowest premiums were obtained at the smaller sales. At the small or mixed sales buyers are often reluctant to start a load of preconditioned calves, as they will not be able to complete it without mixing in regular calves. It has been suggested by many buyers that the small sales begin with their largest drafts of preconditioned calves, so that the buyers become committed early in the sale.

Selling condition was also an important factor at several of the smaller sales. In many cases the calves were brought to the market directly off full feed just hours before the sale started. When these calves came in the sales ring, they were often dirty and were obviously very full. The buyers discounted these calves very heavily and there were no premiums paid.

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF THE AVERAGE PRICES AND PREMIUMS PAID FOR PRECONDITIONED CALVES IN 1985

		STEERS			HEIFERS		
LOCATION	DATE OF SALE	NO. OF CALVES	AVG. PRICE $/cwt	PREMIUM $/cwt	NO. OF CALVES	AVG. PRICE $/cwt	PREMIUM $/cwt
Grande Prairie	Nov. 29	372	83.59	3.91	250	72.51	3.52
Clyde[1]	Dec. 2	464	83.49	4.24	343	74.41	4.34[1]
Ft. MacLeod							
- ACPF Calves	Dec. 5	437	91.33	6.60	226	80.16	4.11
- Prime Feeders	Dec. 6	1,159	92.99	8.26	819	83.06	7.01
Edmonton	Dec. 6	397	84.15	3.06	225	74.74	3.41
Ponoka	Dec. 7	997	90.92	5.35	641	79.62	2.19
Red Deer	Dec. 9	613	90.93	4.90	524	80.03	4.02
TOTAL		4,439			3028		
WEIGHTED AVERAGE			90.20	5.90		79.72	4.40

[1] The premiums for the Clyde sale are estimated from the total sale average which included 50% preconditioned and 50% regular cattle compared to the average for the regular sales before and after. These premiums were not included in the calculation for the weighted average premium.

The price premiums for previous years are compared in Table 5. In 1985 the average price premium for 7,467 preconditioned calves was $5.90 for steers and $4.40 for heifers. The average premium over the past six years has been $5.08 per cwt. for steers and $4.17 for heifers. These premiums are a good indication of the strong demand for certified

preconditioned calves. Some of the top quality calves were purchased by eastern Canada buyers and the rest were mainly bought by local farmer-feeders.

TABLE 5

PRICE PREMIUMS FOR PRECONDITIONED CALVES BY YEAR (1980-1985)

		STEERS		HEIFERS	
YEAR	NO. SALES	NO. HEAD	PRICE PREMIUM	NO. HEAD	PRICE PREMIUM
1980	1	495	5.66	223	4.04
1981	6	1,518	4.04	1,493	2.66
1982	7	2,827	5.56	1,683	5.74
1983	8	2,605	4.50	1,574	2.43
1984	7	5,264	4.67	3,386	4.68
1985	7	4,439	5.90	3,028	4.40
OVERALL AVERAGE PRICE			5.08		4.17

At some sales, calves which the owners claimed to be preconditioned, but were not ear-tagged or certified were presented for sale along with fully certified preconditioned calves. It appears that buyers were very skeptical about purchasing these calves. An analysis of one mixed sale which had over 500 certified preconditioned calves as well regular and non-certified preconditioned calves revealed a distinct premium for the certified preconditioned calves. In this sale, certified preconditioned steer calves brought $6.60/cwt more than the regular calves while the non-certified calves only brought $0.77/cwt more than the regular calves. For heifers, the certified preconditioned calves received $4.11/cwt more and the non-certified preconditioned calves brought $0.87/cwt more than regular calves. Obviously, the buyers paid a meaningful premium only for the green-tagged Alberta Certified Preconditioned calves.

Weaning Performance

In 1985 we obtained weaning and performance information on 1985 head of calves from 18 selected herds representing all areas of Alberta (Table

6). The performance in these herds varied depending on type of cattle, feeding program and herd management. Average daily gains ranged from 0.57 lbs. for one group of heifers to 2.7 lbs. for a group of Charlois-cross steers. The average daily gain was 1.95 lbs. for 1,171 steers and 1.94 lbs. per day for 814 heifers. The average total cost of preconditioning in these herds was $62.38 per head for a cost per pound of gain of $0.52. The this cost included feed, medicines and labor but not interest.

Using the information from these herds (Table 6) it is possible to estimate a net profit for preconditioning. The average weight of steer calves was 457 lbs. at weaning, and if they sold for $88.50 (October 4 price for top steers at Ponoka) they would have brought $404.45. If we add $62.38 as the cost of preconditioning and $3.00 per head for death loss, the total value of calves before preconditioning becomes $469.83. Using the average selling weight 581 lbs. at $90.20 cwt (the average Alberta price paid for preconditioned calves) the gross return for preconditioned calves was $524.06. The difference represents an estimated net profit for preconditioning of $54.23.

TABLE 6

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE OF PRECONDITIONED CALVES
FROM WEANING TO SALE 1985

Number of Herds		18
Number of Calves		1985
Average Starting Weight -	Steers, lb.	457
-	Heifers, lb.	419
Average Selling Weight -	Steers, lb.	581
-	Heifers, lb.	536
Average Gain, lbs.		121
Days Weaned		62
Average Daily Gain		1.95
Total Cost, $/hd.		62.38
Cost per pound of gain, $/lb.		0.52

ACPF Producer Survey

The results of the 1985 survey of producers of preconditioned calves are summarized in Table 7. The response was excellent again this year with 77 producers, representing 6,275 head of calves, returning the questionnaires. The average herd size increased this year to 81 head from 65 in 1984. This reflected the increased numbers of large herds in the program. The average number of days weaned also increased to 50 days as more producers recognized the additional performance and returns from the longer weaning period.

Some of the measures of health status were increased from last year. The individual treatment rate went up to 4.6% from 3.7% for 1984 and the group treatment rate also increased to 20.5%. However, the overall average death loss remained at 0.7%, the same as last year. Bloat was still a problem in some herds this year, but bloat losses decreased to 0.2% compared to 0.35% in 1984. Treatment costs were $6.68 per animal treated or $0.85 for each animal preconditioned. Nearly one-half of the producers participating in the survey did not treat any calves and 74% did not have any death loss.

TABLE 7

SUMMARY OF 1985 SURVEY OF PRODUCERS OF PRECONDITIONED CALVES

Production Data	
Total Number Of Calves	6275
Average Herd Size	81
Average Selling Weight - Steers, lb.	581
- Heifers, lb.	536
Days Weaned, Average	50
Health Data	
Calves Individually Treated, %	4.6
Calves Mass Medicated, %	20.5
Death Loss - Total, %	0.7
- Bloat, %	0.2
Cost Data	
Feed, $/Head	34.84
Vaccine and Insecticides, $/Head	2.65
Treatment Cost, $/Head	0.85
Labor - 1.2 hr. at $9.00/Calf	10.85
Total, $/Head (not including interest)	49.19

Generally, the rations fed to preconditioned calves consisted of grain, supplement and free choice hay. The average intakes were 5.5 lb. of grain, 0.5 lb. supplement and 14.2 lb. of forage. The average total cost per head of preconditioning was $49.19 per calf.

Producer Comments

As the concept of preconditioning gains acceptance each year, cow-calf producers become more positive about the program. Of the 77 producers who returned the questionnaire, 90% felt they would continue with preconditioning. Most comments were very positive:

> 'We are happy with the program because it has brought a veterinarian onto our yard, and discussions with him about preconditioning and other livestock problems has helped improve our total operation.'

This comment reflects some of the additional benefits of the program in that it is a good opportunity for producers to discuss total herd management with a veterinarian on their farm. Other comments appear to verify what studies have revealed about preconditioning:

> 'One thing this program has pointed out clearly is that earlier weaning is a great advantage. Some calves were weaned September 1, September 30 and October 20. Pasture conditions were quite good in late fall but the early weaned calves did and are today doing better than late weaned calves. The early weaned cows came in much better from poorer pasture than did late weaned cows from the better pasture.'

These comments, from a producer, who has over 150 cows, reflect the positive experience many producers have with preconditioning, particularly those who look at the advantage of total herd management.

The major complaint of those producers who did not wish to continue on the program was the low return. One producer commented:

> 'I will never precondition calves again unless the price was at least $0.10 higher for them.'

While this producer was unhappy, he was not totally negative because he went on to add:

> 'If I was a feedlot operator I would buy preconditioned calves if I could, as much of the risk is gone out of them.'

These comments often come from producers who have had difficulty getting calves started on feed and are unable to achieve good gains. Certainly the cold weather in November was a difficult period for most producers.

This year there were more preconditioned calf sales. Many of these were mixed with non-certified preconditioned calves and freshly weaned calves. A number of producers expressed concern about these mixed sales. One producer commented:

> 'I am very disappointed that farmers ship calves that are not preconditioned to take advantage of the farmers that do have nice preconditioned calves',

Other producers expressed concern about auction markets advertising mixed sales:

> 'We were disappointed when we heard the radio announcement for a Preconditioned sale, telling producers to bring their calves and it does not matter if they are preconditioned as long as they are weaned. We do not need advertising like that or it will defeat the whole purpose of preconditioning.'

These concerns show the need for producers to have more contact with the auction market. Certainly, if these concerns were expressed directly to the auction manager involved the problems would be worked out. From the auction market's point of view, it is difficult to organize a preconditioned calf sale if the consignors do not call in before the sale to give them an idea of the number of calves that will be coming to the sale. The auction markets need sufficient numbers of calves to have successful sales.

ACPF Feeder Survey

This year, 113 questionnaires were sent to cattle feeders who purchased certified preconditioned calves. We only received information on 1,296 preconditioned calves and 2,124 head of regular calves in 21 feedlots in Alberta and Ontario. Many of the calves were bought by order buyers, and we appreciated the effort some of them took to get these questionnaires to their clients. However other buyers preferred to keep their clients names confidential and did not forward the questionnaires to their

clients. We must respect this confidentiality and therefore do not try to contact these people directly.

Treatment rates and death losses (Table 8) were substantially lower in preconditioned calves again this year. In Alberta, 3.8% of the certified preconditioned calves were treated and 0.17% died compared to 27.2% treated and 1.16% death loss for regular calves. When only the eight feedlots with both preconditioned calves and regular calves are included, there was a 0.5% treatment rate and 0.12% death loss for ACPF calves.

TABLE 8

HEALTH PERFORMANCE OF ACPF CALVES SURVEYED IN 1985

PROGRAM TYPE	NUMBER OF LOTS	NUMBER OF ANIMALS	PERCENT TREATED	PERCENT DIED	FEED[1] ADAPTATION
ALBERTA					
Preconditioned	16	1,161	3.8	.17	1.13
Regular	8	2,067	27.2	1.16	1.9
ONTARIO					
Preconditioned	5	135	11.9	0	1.5
Regular	1	57	31.6	0	1.0
OVERALL					
Preconditioned	21	1,296	4.6	.16	1.17
Regular	9	2,124	27.3	1.13	1.77

[1] Feed adaptation was coded as 1 for no problem to 4 for major problems.

We received only a limited amount of information from Ontario this year as many of the calves went to stocker dealers who repackaged them and were not able to follow up on their performance. On five farms with 135 head of calves, the treatment rate was 11.9% with no death loss compared to a treatment rate of 31.6% and no death loss for regular calves.

Due to the small number of calves this year it is more meaningful to look at health performance of preconditioned calves over the last six years (Table 9). Since 1980, there was a treatment rate of 9.1% and a death loss of 0.64% for 9,509 head of preconditioned calves in Alberta.

The regular calves used for comparison had a treatment rate of 21.5%, more than double that of the preconditioned calves, and a death loss of 2.0% which is three times that for the preconditioned calves. In Ontario the results were similar, 8.7% treated and 0.2% died for preconditioned compared to 25% treated and 0.74% died for regular calves. It certainly appears that the preconditioning program decreases the disease problems and death loss in the feedlot. In the feeder survey, one-half of the producers did not treat any calves at all.

All the producers that answered the survey were happy with the performance of the preconditioned calves which they bought, and said they would continue to buy Alberta Certified Preconditioned calves. Six producers, (33%) thought the weaning period should be increased to 45 days or more.

TABLE 9

HEALTH PERFORMANCE OF ACPF CALVES 1980-1985

	PRECONDITIONED			REGULAR		
	NO. CALVES	PERCENT TREATED	PERCENT DIED	NO. CALVES	PERCENT TREATED	PERCENT DIED
ALBERTA						
1980	236	7.6	0.0	1,088	18.7	1.0
1981	1,513	17.9	1.2	627	26.8	1.0
1982	2,724	7.3	0.5	3,269	15.5	2.0
1983	2,033	10.4	0.5	2,775	29.9	2.8
1984	1,842	6.8	0.9	2,387	15.0	2.6
1985	1,161	3.8	0.2	2,067	27.2	1.2
TOTAL	9,509	9.1	0.6	12,213	21.5	2.0
ONTARIO						
1980	213	12.0	.6	770	46.0	1.0
1981	139	11.5	0.0	109	20.2	0.9
1982	186	8.3	0.3	907	18.8	0.4
1983	436	8.5	0.0	432	25.7	0.9
1984	900	7.3	0.2	846	12.4	0.8
1985	135	11.8	0.0	57	31.6	0.0
TOTAL	2,009	8.7	0.2	3,121	25.0	0.7

One feedlot operator commented:

> 'The calves bought at the preconditioned sale were selling higher than I could have bought from normal sales, but judging by the way they have acted the last 60 days in the feedlot I think the extra money is well worth it.'

This seems to be typical of most feeders who responded.

Producers of preconditioned calves are going to have to be more careful with dehorning and castration. There were several complaints about bulls and many calves that were only tipped and not totally dehorned. One feeder complained:

> 'You buy calves that have horns, nuts and only preconditioned 2-3 weeks. Some of them are all right but if they (the producers) want top dollar maybe they should do what the rules read.'

If the preconditioned program is to be successful we will have to correct these problems and maintain a top quality product. Cattle feeders who are not happy with Alberta Certified Preconditioned calves are encouraged to contact the Health Management Branch of the Department of Agriculture or the co-ordinator of the Alberta Certified Preconditioned Feeder Program. Any complaints are then followed up and the producer and veterinarian involved are notified and encouraged to explain to the feeder how the problems occurred. Through this communication the appropriate producers are made aware of the concerns of the feedlot operator.

IV. CONCLUSION

The number of calves preconditioned in 1985 were maintained at about the same level as last year. The program continued to attract new cow-calf producers. Many producers recognize that the Alberta Certified Preconditioning Program can increase their returns in years where pasture and feed are in short supply. Some of these producers are changing their herd management to include early weaning every year.

The total number of calves preconditioned in Alberta has remained similar to 1984 but the areas where they come from has changed. The drought in

the southern part of the province has increased the number nearly 50%, while the central and northwest areas the fall rains delayed harvest and decreased numbers of preconditioned calves. The number of calves preconditioned in the northeast of the province has been slowly increasing.

The demand for preconditioned calves continues to be strong. Price premiums, reviewed at major sales, averaged $5.90 for steers and $4.40 for heifers which is encouraging for producers. The withdrawal of choramphenical from the market and the increased disease problems in the feedlots this year has encouraged some of the larger custom feedlots to take a second look at preconditioned calves. Their major concern is being able to buy the required number of calves in a short period of time. If this market develops, and producers respond with increased numbers, the future of Alberta Certified Preconditioned Feeder Program is optimistic.